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Thomasina E. Jordon Indian Tribes of Virginia Federal Recognition Act, HR1294
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Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, and guests: I am Dr. Helen Rountree, Professor Emerita of Anthropology at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. My training and publications are in "ethnohistory," a combination of cultural anthropology and history. Initially I worked with Shoshone Indian people in Nevada, but I began researching the Native Americans of eastern Virginia, historical and modern, in 1969. I am the only scholar, whether anthropologist or historian, who has been active in the specialty that long. I spent every free moment of the first eight years, when I was not teaching for a living, scouring the published and unpublished records from 1607 onward. That included speed-reading the often unindexed county record books. I have spent substantial periods since then hunting for more records and studying other subjects, like ethnic identity, that are relevant to learning about Indian tribes. Shoehorned into all that work were face-to-face visits and occasional spells of living among the modern Virginia people, the people whose Indianness, compared with the Nevada Indians I knew, impressed me so much.

I am not the first social scientist to work with these six tribes (*see the attached quick-reference chart*). My predecessors' work goes back nearly 120 years, beginning with James Mooney of the Smithsonian Institution and continuing with Frank Speck of the University of Pennsylvania, among others. Like them, I have written up my findings for others to read; unlike them, I have done it in no less than six books (so far), the most germane of them for this hearing being *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of*

Virginia Through Four Centuries (University of Oklahoma Press, 1990; no. 196 in the Civilization of the American Indian series). Roughly one-third of that volume is devoted to endnotes and bibliography, to prove I didn't make anything up. I have offered to send copies of the documents unearthed in my research to the BAR in the Bureau of Indian Affairs; the BAR has never yet seen fit to respond to my offer, not even when I talked to their representative face-to-face at the Senate committee hearing last summer.

The last thing to say about my work is that I have always supported my research with funds saved back from my own salary and from small university grants. Like the tribes I work with, I don't have backers: I pay my own way. So the testimony you are about to hear is my own; the Indian people are my colleagues, not my employers. And that testimony is literally based upon decades of intensive research.

I have been able to trace the existence of Indian groups across 400 years in eastern Virginia. Many of today's tribes come from refugee communities, meaning reduced Indian populations that merged in order to keep going. But there were elements in them descended from the early seventeenth century tribes that give them their names today.

It was not easy to find records about the tribes. In the 18th century, if a group never had a reservation (the Monacans) or if reservations were lost (the other five), the Commonwealth of Virginia took no further interest in the people. Meanwhile, local governments' records were mainly concerned with property and criminal behavior, neither of which involved many Indians. (If you were poor and law-abiding, you were invisible.) Several of the key courthouses were burned in the 19th century. U.S. Census-

takers did not record the names of family members – only the heads of household – until 1850.

Aggravating the problem in finding Indian records was Virginia's reluctance to let Indians appear in the records as "Indians." One relatively tolerant law of 1833 created a category they could fall into: POMBNBFNOM (Persons of Mixed Blood Not Being Free Negroes or Mulattoes). Needless to say, the people who got certified in that category never subsequently appeared in the records under that jaw-breaking name. Instead before the Civil Rights era, Virginia racial policy became increasingly intolerant of anyone claiming an Indian identity rather than the catch-all "colored" one.

In the first half of the 20th century, anybody claiming to be Indian and any non-Indian cooperating with such persons came in for humiliation that was severe and very public. That was possible because an entire state bureau, the Vital Statistics Bureau, became a policing agency on matters racial, issuing public announcements, sending a circular to all county officials statewide, and mailing pamphlets to thousands of private citizens – at taxpayers' expense. In both the circular and the pamphlet, the Indian tribes were specifically attacked. The effect upon the appearance of "Indian" entries in state, local, and even federal records like the U.S. Census schedules should be obvious. It didn't stop with humiliation. Thanks to the Racial Integrity Law of 1923, anyone insisting upon the "Indian" label in Virginia could legally be sent to jail; several Indian people did in fact go to jail for it.

Therefore like a fieldworking anthropologist, I not only collected all documentary references to Indians, but I also acquired recent lists of Indian *personal names* – several 20th century tribal rolls being available – and then worked backward as

far as I could in the records, constructing genealogies and collecting the records about the people in those genealogies to see how the communities shaped up.

Social scientists like me look for several things in determining whether or not a group is a distinct ethnic group. I searched for the same things that the Bureau of Indian Affairs, later on, expected to see before acknowledging people as Indian tribes. I have found clear evidence that the people before you today meet those criteria as far back as the public records allow me to look: living in geographical clusters, being predominantly in-marrying, and having most of their associations with one another rather than with outsiders. After the Civil War, when free non-whites could openly have them in Virginia, those associations show up as tribal churches, followed by tribal schools. On several occasions, beginning in 1892, the federal Office of Indian Affairs (later the BIA) was contacted for financial help for those schools. The answer was always "no" – not because the people were not Indians, but because the last treaty they signed (in 1677-80) had far predated the existence of the federal government. Washington was uncomfortable with that. The people of these six tribes had possessed *informal* political organizations – like many ethnic groups called "tribes" in the Third World – since the dying out of their chiefs in the early 18th century. When they formalized things in the 20th century, the tribes took out charters with the State Corporation Commission, something the white supremacists could not legally prevent them from doing.

Virginia was most definitely an anti-Indian state in the 19th and most of the 20th centuries, and ironically enough, some of the blame can be laid on Pocahontas. No other state has as many or as socially prominent descendants of that so-called "princess." Her legend – for that is exactly what it is, a legend – has long blinded most Virginians to the

existence of the modern Indian tribes in their midst. Even now, when I say I work with Virginia Indians, people nearly always start in asking me about Pocahontas. When Virginia wanted to make the "one-drop" rule (i.e., one "drop" of non-white "blood" making a person "colored") into a law, legislators found that it couldn't be done without making some of the state's aristocrats get into the Jim Crow coach. The bill had to be rewritten, making an exception for "the Pocahontas Descendants." The tone of the defenders of the white race in Virginia was even more strident than elsewhere, as a result, for that exception was seen as a hole in the dyke by the die-hards, one of whom characterized the "Indian" racial category as a "way-station to whiteness."

I have always found it amusing, how wrong the white-supremacists were in assuming that absolutely everybody would "pass" for white who could. The tribes I work with were not and are not interested in doing that. When Virginia repealed its racial definitions law in 1975, and anybody could claim to be anything, these people went right on saying they were Indian, as they had been doing all along. They had said it to James Mooney in the 1890s, and to the social scientists who followed him. Most of us social scientists have been North American Indian specialists, and we have worked with these Virginia communities because they are *tribes* of *Indians*. I submit to you that they deserve acknowledgment as such now.